DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 1/26/82

RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE _____
TS AUTH. _____ REASON(S) _____
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED☐ RELEASABLE☑
RELEASE DENIED☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS _____

4. Other impressions gathered from the comments of observers included the following:

(a) As is usual with Vietnamese elections in recent years -- but probably more so this time -- get-out-the-vote efforts by local officials were seen to be aggressive on election day. Mobile loudspeakers and hand-carried microphones were used in many localities through most of the day to drum up a good turnout. It was evident in talking to officials in rural areas that they deemed a large turnout to be highly important.

(b) There had been doubt as to the extent to which voters were aware of the procedures for casting invalid votes (i.e. votes of non-confidence in Thieu), since neither the GVN nor the opposition had made much effort to explain the invalidation of the ballot to the voters. However, in at least two localities (An Xuyen and Bac Lieu Provinces), observers learned that "seminars" and meetings had been held before election day to advise voters how to cast "no confidence" ballots. Moreover, in watching the ballot-counting in another locality (Nha Trang) it was plain that quite a few voters understood how to vote against Thieu.

(c) In contrast to the above, observers thought the atmosphere and certain physical details in some of the polling stations tended to favor Thieu. Thieu-Huong posters were on the premises of some stations (though not inside the stations themselves). In Phu Yen Province, about half of the voting stations observed did not have any receptacle inside the curtained booths in which voters could discard their ballot, should they wish to cast an empty envelope as an anti-Thieu gesture. Another observer heard from a polling-observation official that all waste receptacles had been ordered removed from polling booths in one Saigon ward when the ward chief noted many thrown away ballots. There were also signs in most polling stations saying "for every envelope one ballot" and "voters may not take ballots with them from the polling place" (such signs, however, are standard for every election). The relative thinness of the paper used for the voting envelopes (allowing sharp-eyed officials to see whether a ballot was inside when the voter proceeded from the booth to the ballot box) was also remarked upon by a few observers, as was shortness of curtains on some booths (permitting observation of any ballot discarding by the voter). However, it should be noted that most Vietnamese envelopes are made of thin paper, and the shortness of the curtains in certain places may have been inadvertent.

(d) Observation of evening ballot-counting in one station in Nha Trang showed that roughly one-third of the voters in that urban locality had cast invalid ballots against the Thieu-Huong slate. Most did so by

DECLASSIFIED

casting an empty envelope, though a significant number tore their ballot. Officials at this station counted even slightly torn ballots as invalid, since it was clear that the bulk of these had been torn deliberately, but an observer in another station reported that only major tears were listed as invalid where he was. Observers concluded that this procedure was not followed consistently from place to place.

(e) In the same station in Nha Trang, an interesting discrepancy was noted in the tally of voters. The number of envelopes counted by the officials totaled 687. However, according to the clipped edges from the voters' cards, 716 voters had come to the station. Apparently, some people had just gotten their cards clipped without proceeding to vote. The 716 figure was posted later at the Nha Trang election center as the station's turnout (with 4 votes somehow recorded as "lost"). The number of valid votes (470) posted at the center was the same as that previously counted at the station, so that the difference was put in the anti-Thieu column. (The question arises, of course, as to whether such a difference was put in this column for all stations where it may have occured.)

(f) Observers remarked that they thought the threat of VC activity played no discernable role in the election process. Though some enemy-initiated incidents were reported during the voting period, and there was significant VC activity in the preceding 24 hours, the effect was not apparent to any observersin the places they visited. Non-Communist opposition elements were also generally quiet on election day, and not evident to the observers.

5. In general, observers came away with the impression that a basically democratic exercise had been held, despite noticeable flaws. Some observers who had also seen the 1967 Presidential election were impressed at the progress made in the orderliness of the GVN's handling of the procedures. However, they realized that these impressions were superficial, and the uncontested character of the election was seen by many observers as detrimental to both its validity and its inherent interest. One observer commented that the one-slate voting looked more like a dress rehersal of an election than a real election, but at least it further familiarized the Vietnamese public with the electoral process as a means of choosing their leaders.

BUNKER

DECLASSIFIED